

Change of local people's subjectivity in relation to conservation projects: Menabe Region case study

RAVOLATSARA A.^{1,4,5}, KASSIÉ D.², VOLAMPENO S.³, RAKOTOARISEHENO R.⁴, RANDRIAMAROLAZA L.P.⁵

¹ PhD student in Anthropology, ²CIRAD/IPM, ³CIDST, ⁴CNRE, ⁵Antananarivo University.

INTRODUCTION

Context:

Despite the high level of the Malagasy biodiversity, the island is facing a major threat mainly from deforestation. It has been reported that only 10% of the original forest cover of Madagascar is remaining. In view of the high level of biodiversity and the serious threat, the Malagasy government adopted a new approach by planting 40,000 ha of trees within 5 years in order to cover the vegetation. However, policies and strategies implemented did not produce successful results. This study highlights the interrelationship between local knowledge and conservation.

Objectives:

- To understand the society's behavior and the conservation concept according to the local community;
- To find out any change in aboriginal subjectivity with respect to conservation projects.

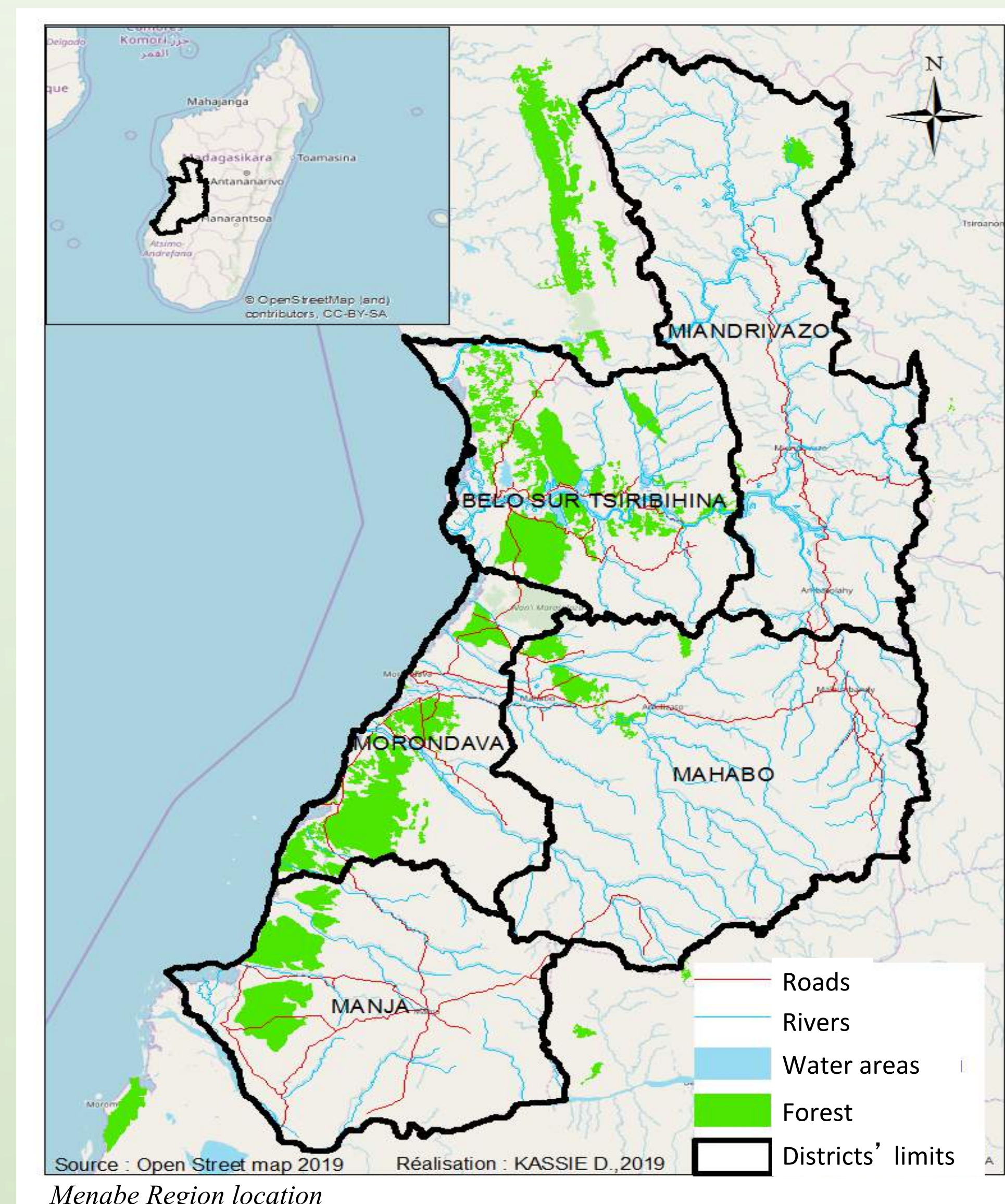
METHODOLOGY

Study site:

Menabe Region, located in the southwestern part of Madagascar. Five villages including Kirindy, Maronfandilia, Lambokely, Kiboy and Tsitakabasia were studied. The ethnic groups are Sakalava, Masikoro, Antandroy, Betsileo and Merina. They are indigenous and migrant people. Areas at risk included: Menabe Antimena protected area, Kirindy dry forest Mitea, Baobab forest and Fokonolona forest.

Data collection:

Individual interviews, focus groups, household surveys and direct observation were carried within these 5 villages.



Menabe Region location



Cleared space at Lambokely

RESULTS

Multiple functions of the forest:

The results revealed that implementation of conservation rules is not a solution to maintain the natural environment. Indigenous people have their own conception of nature, own knowledge including forest and related issues. Indigenous and migrant people have respect for the forest and its associated environment according to the traditional rules such as getting blessed of the supreme being (God) and ancestors.

The forest resource is filled with multiple functions and governed by traditional rules:

- Ecological, economic, cultural and social;
- A shelter for the supreme being;
- A place of worship;
- A place of predilection for the divine-healers;
- A heritage (from generation to generation);
- A collective property;
- Sacred and taboos place;
- Cultural identities;
- A place of rituals, remedies and linked to agricultural production.



Zomba (place of worship) at Kirindy Village



A sacred place at Maronfandilia

DISCUSSION

The conservation concept — occidental concept delimits the uses of this resource, through rules, non-access, prohibition.

This conservation eventually changes the commitment of indigenous people to nature. Example: In the Kirindy Forest (Menabe), the indigenous people no longer have any sense of belonging. For them, the forest has become the property of conservation organizations.

Rules conservation → prohibition → immigration of the local population to other places where they can perpetuate indigenous spiritual practices, including sacred rituals, ceremonies and customs in order to have the blessing of the *Zanahary* and ancestors for success in their daily lives (harvesting, health, livestock, peace,...).

- For a good conservation of biodiversity:
- The conservation concept must be understood by the indigenous
 - Consider the indigenous communities in their relations with natural resources.

CONCLUSION

This anthropological approach of valuing the human capital and their indigenous knowledge is a mechanism for co-management of resources, while enhancing the entire territory, including flora and fauna, soils and humans' traditional cultures. The interrelation of traditional and scientific knowledge is inseparable and complementary for conservation.